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ABSTRACT

Guidelines and examples for using dramatization to teach elementary German are presented. Dramatization can be used productively as an aid to learning even at the very beginning of a course or in an academic environment that is hostile to innovation. In order to learn an utterance in a foreign language, the students must be able to project their imaginations into a situation that calls for such an utterance. Before many of the basics of surface structure are learned, simple exchanges between strangers that involve only a few words can be dramatized. Simple classroom situations can be dramatized by using vivid expressions, all of which must be taught with the appropriate intonations, emphases, and gestures. This allows the learners to imagine the context for the exchanges. Textbook exercises can be milked for their dramatic potential by adding gestures, expressions, and intonations to the dialogs, or they can be replaced by more realistic or earthier situations. Vivid dramatizations are especially important to illustrate a point of grammar that is sharply constrastive to English by promoting empathy with the way the point of grammar works psychologically. (RW)

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Minimal-Context Dramatizations in the Foreign Language Classroom: An Approach to Elementary German

by Barbara and Francis Lide

Paper presented at the session on the Rassias Method at the convention of the Modern Language Association, December, 1982.

Our chairman Dennis Seniff had a stroke of inspiration when he put into the title of this year's session a reference to homo ludens, to the human species as the playing. For this ludic dimension, this dimension of play, or of das Spielerische, as they say less obscurely in German, is necessary in calling forth what is essential to all successful foreign language learning--the active involvement of the imagination.

Successfully learning a foreign language requires precisely that--the imagination at play. In order to learn an utterance with ease, you must project yourself imaginatively into a situation, a context, that calls for that utterance. Veteran foreign language learners know this automatically, but all too often the inexperienced student is simply left to intuit it without guidance. Teachers can engage this active involvement of the imagination through the ludic activity of dramatization even at the beginning of the elementary sequence, and even in the smallest and most minimal contexts.

We anticipate a certain skepticism on the part of some language teachers. Some may think, "That's all very well and good at the intermediate and advanced levels, but at the beginning of the elementary level you simply don't have enough grammar to give you room for maneuver. Some German teachers may think, "That may be fine for French or Spanish, but in German we have a complex noun system that keeps us from introducing attributive adjectives until late in the sequence, or even introducing prepositions until students have learned the cases they govern." Or we can imagine other teachers saying, "Yes, but the textbook my committee has chosen puts so much emphasis on structure and morphology that it presents very little of the target language that's worth dramatizing. And what's more, my course supervisor

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is somewhat hostile toward innovation, expects me to get to a certain point in the book by the end of the term, and to prepare my students to do well on the common final. I can't afford to go off on tangents wasting class time with dramatizations." We hope to answer all these potential objections in the course of this presentation. We intend to show how the vitality and dynamism that John Rassias has introduced into foreign language teaching can be injected into the elementary course even at the very beginning, even in a hostile curricular context, and, yes, even in German.

Many of the most useful expressions in a language have little or no surface structure, and between strangers the entire exchange may be limited to only a few words:

--You are deferring to a stranger in getting off an elevator. Polite gesture, hand outstretched at waist level, showing the way: "Bitte!" (After you!)

--You see a vacant seat at a table in a crowded pub or simple restaurant. You go up to the people seated at the table and ask:
"Entschuldigen Sie, ist hier noch frei?"
SEATED DINER (hand gesture):"Ja bitte."

--You want to introduce the expression "Hallo!" as used to get people's attention. After making a transaction, you leave your wallet on the classroom table and walk off. Someone picks it up, runs after you, and sings out, "Hallo!" You turn around. The finder waves the wallet, smiling.

--There is a knock on the door. You sing out,"Herein!" Latecomers to class can be made to knock on the locked door. The class sings out, "Herein."

--Shoulder a chair or other suitable object and traipse with it dangerously through the classroom. Sing out, "Vorsicht!" You can go around the class for individual responses, having students sing out, "Vorsicht!", and getting everyone else in the class to duck and look around.

--In German, there is an infinitive of command which is almost never seen in elementary textbooks because it has no appreciable surface structure. Put a number of verbs on the overhead: schiessen (to shoot), schimpfen (to scold), gähnen (to yawn), einschlafen (to fall asleep), weinen (to cry). Model "Nicht schiessen!" Without warning, assume a shooting crouch, pointing an imaginary

pistol at somebody. The person pointed at raises his hands in terror and says, "Nicht schiessen!" The shooting crouch, by the way, is an excellent example of instant creation of context through mime.

--When students come in late, give them a mock, histrionic bawling out in German. They must defend themselves with "Nicht schimpfen!"--this in a tone of pained urgency and accompanied by the defensive gesture of both arms halfway outstretched, palms forward, fingers slightly parted and bent. If a student yawns, anyone can admonish him with "Nicht gähnen!" Anyone who looks tired is hit with "Nicht einschlafen!" The possibilities are almost unlimited.

When there is little room for maneuver at the beginning of the elementary sequence, the teacher should have the courage to reduce utterances to the essentials at hand, or below the level of complete sentences. Add a little in-class mayhem--which always goes over well with students--and you have this routine for teaching some of the German prepositions and the cases they govern:

TEACHER (holds up piece of chalk): Die Kreide.
CLASS (loudly and in a chanting rhythm): Die Kreide.
TEACHER (pats the wall): Die Wand.
CLASS (chants): Die Wand.
TEACHER: Mit der Kreide.
CLASS (chants): Mit der Kreide.
TEACHER: Gegen die Wand. (Throws chalk against wall.)
CLASS (chants): Gegen die Wand.
TEACHER (holds up newspaper): Die Zeitung.
CLASS (chants): Die Zeitung.
TEACHER (makes fist): Die Faust.
CLASS (chants): Die Faust
TEACHER (brandishes fist): Mit der Faust.
CLASS (chants): Mit der Faust.
TEACHER: Durch die Zeitung. (Smashes fist through newspaper.)
CLASS (chants): Durch die Zeitung.
TEACHER (points): Der Tisch.
CLASS (chants): Der Tisch.
TEACHER (points to foot): Der Fuss.
CLASS (chants): Der Fuss.
TEACHER: Mit dem Fuss.
CLASS (chants): Mit dem Fuss.
TEACHER: Gegen den Tisch. (Kicks table.)
CLASS (chants): Gegen den Tisch.
TEACHER (points): Der Fuss.
CLASS (chants): Der Fuss.
TEACHER (brings classroom wastebasket to center stage):
Der Papierkorb.
CLASS (chants): Der Papierkorb.

TEACHER: Mit dem Fuss.
CLASS (chants): Mit dem Fuss
TEACHER: Gegen den Papierkorb. (Kicks wastebasket.)
CLASS (chants): Gegen den Papierkorb.
TEACHER (holds head with both hands): Der Kopf.
CLASS (chants): Der Kopf.
TEACHER (pats wall): Die Wand.
CLASS (chants): Die Wand.
TEACHER: Mit dem Kopf.
CLASS (chants): Mit dem Kopf.
TEACHER: Gegen die Wand. (Butts head against wall.)
CLASS (chants): Gegen die Wand.

This exercise could escalate into generalized student mayhem, with everyone in the class going through the motions like a class in aerobic dancing. Alternatively, at the beginning of subsequent class periods the students could be asked to act out what was demonstrated earlier. In this connection, anyone with some knowledge with soccer terminology in the target language could create similar learning games with a soccer ball, heading the ball, kicking it, and even shooting a goal.

In the elementary course, dramatizing the dialogue is frequently a matter of dramatizing the individual utterance. You create a nonverbal context in which the utterance is appropriate. Let's say you want to teach the utterance, "Wie ist denn das passiert?" (How did that happen?) Model the utterance and have the students repeat it. Then take the contents of the classroom wastebasket and strew them across the floor.

TEACHER (simulates leaving the class; returns and discovers the damage; recoils in shock, with an inhaled gasp): Wie ist denn <u>das</u> passiert?

TEACHER (takes a seat with the students and suddenly discovers the damage again; points, wide-eyed): Wie ist denn <u>das</u> passiert?

The students then repeat the utterance in chorus and individually, including the pointing, the gasp, the shock. We feel that it is important to insist that the students act out the emotions and the body language. It is impossible not to be involved when you are fully engaged in playing a role. The vivid dramatization also helps to insure both the proper speaking speed and the proper intonation contour.

In general, no utterance should be taught without expression or special intonation if you can possibly help it. Rather, utterances should be charged whenever possible with emotional content and involvement and given an unusual and emphatic sentence stress accompanied by appropriate body language. Some examples:

--Imploring heaven to witness a wrong: "Was hab ich nur verbrochen:" (What sins have I committed to deserve this--a marvelously colorful German expression.)

--The reaction of someone being left out of things: "Fragen Sie mich nicht. Ich werde nicht gefragt." (Don't ask me. I'm not being consulted.)

--Same as above, hurt and with a helpless shrug: "Ich bin nicht gefragt worden."

--The subjunctive as the verb form for nonpushy, polite timidity. Indicative: chest out, aggressive, the body language of self-confidence: "Ich habe eine Frage." (I have a question.) Subjunctive: hand tentatively raised, head pulled in, hunched over, body language of timidity: "Ich hätte eine Frage." (Same meaning, but more polite.)

--A watch is solicited from a member of the class. "Hundert Dollar? Für diese Uhr?" Self-satisfied, pulls self up to full height:"Ich hätte nicht soviel dafür bezahlt." (I wouldn't have paid that much for it.)

--Ditto:"Ich hätte das nicht getan." (I wouldn't have done that.)

--Ditto, perhaps to someone looking a bit worse for the wear: "Ich wäre früher nach Hause gegangen." (I would have gone home earlier.) What we are dealing with in these last three utterances is implied contrast. Inventive teachers could elaborate greatly.

--The subjunctive in polite conversation. Superpolite intonation, repeated polite nods: "Oh, das wäre sehr nett von Ihnen."

--Comforting someone in emotional distress. Low intonation register of reassurance, hand outstretched to touch the distressed person: "Es wird schon alles gut gehen."

Not only is it fun when students can be persuaded to use the emotion-charged intonation and accompanying body language; it has a sound pedagogical basis as well, for the intonation, the emotion, the kinesics actually evoke an image of an appropriate context for the utterance in question.

Exercises and examples given in the textbook can also be milked for their dramatic potential and infused with a strong ludic element. Take, for example, the exercise involving false identification of objects--a type of exercise common to all three of our heavily taught languages. The exercise can be done straight, as follows:

> TEACHER (Holding up ballpoint): Ist das ein Papierkorb?
> STUDENT: Nein, das ist kein Papierkorb. Das ist ein Kugelschreiber.

This exercise can be done with greater pizzazz as follows:

> TEACHER (contemplating ball point; with a look of stupidity, trying to puzzle things out): Ist das ein Papierkorb?
> STUDENT ADDRESSED (impatient and put out by such incredible stupidity, with intonation and expression to match): Neiin, das ist kein Papierkorb. Das ist doch ein Kugelschreiber.

Foreign language teachers must have the courage to be unabashedly corny. As for the constraints of class time and covering the book, it doesn't take much longer to go through an exercise in a lively manner than it does in a dull and lifeless manner.

Frequently, the examples your book gives you can be replaced by livelier and more plausible examples that are too corny or too earthy to put in a textbook. Thus in all German textbooks, it is necessary to discuss the omission of the dependent infinitive with a modal auxiliary when the infinitive is obvious from the context. An example in English would be, "I want out." The best German example of this is "Ich muss auf die Toilette." You don't care how you get to the toilet--whether you traipse, dash, or crawl--as long as you get there. The opportunities for dramatizing urgency and acute distress are limitless. You can write the student's role in a dialogue on a card and conspire with a better student to act it out with you. It would go something like this:

STUDENT (seated at one end of the semicircle, raises hand timidly to interrupt the class): Entschuldigen Sie, Herr Professor, darf ich auf die Toilette?
TEACHER (slightly incredulous): Sie müssen auf die Toilette? Können Sie nicht warten?
STUDENT (cowed into submission).

Time lapse.

STUDENT (raises hand): Entschuldigen Sie, aber ich muss wirklich auf die Toilette.
TEACHER: Nein, Sie dürfen nicht auf die Toilette.
STUDENT (cowed into submission again).

Time lapse.

STUDENT (raises hand for recognition).
TEACHER: Na, was schon wieder?
STUDENT: Ich muss auf die Toilette. Dringend:
(Rushes out of the room.)

As all German teachers have occasion to point out, "mustn't" does not mean the same thing as "don't have to." One way to dramatize this is to imagine a situation in which you are in a foreign country and in danger of committing some faux pas. A native of the country warns you against it:

NATIVE (gesture and body language of benevolent warning, one hand partially outstretched, palm forward, shaken from side to side, head slightly averted):

Nein, nein, das dürfen Sie nicht tun:

Nein, nein, das dürfen Sie nicht sagen:

The same body language and intonation are used with the German würde-form, the conditional:

NATIVE (same as above): Nein, nein, das würde ich nicht versuchen: (Vary by substituting infinitives.)

Vivid dramatizations are especially important when a point of grammar is sharply contrastive to English, when it's a matter of empathy into the way that point of grammar works psychologically. An example of such a situation is the optional object-first word order in the German independent clause. In the spoken language, object-first word order is used not only for emphasis, but when the object of the sentence looms large in the speaker's consciousness. We chose to dramatize object-

first word order with what, to an American undergraduate, would be one of the most revolting foods imaginable--blood sausage:

STUDENT (to teacher): Essen Sie gern Blutwurst?
TEACHER (incredulously): Blutwurst? Nein [wince and shudder of revulsion], Blutwurst esse ich nicht.

When students act this out, those who can wince and shudder expressively should be rewarded with a round of applause from the class. Also, you can twit students by having them act out the exchange by shuddering at the very thought of beer. The more vividly something is dramatized, by the way, the more effortlessly it sticks in the learner's mind. With "Blutwurst esse ich nicht," students who did poorly on almost everything else got this point right when it was included on a quiz--and this is a relatively difficult point of grammar.

A telephone call is an excellent creator of instant context:

Phone rings.
TEACHER (picks up phone, holds hand around an imaginary receiver): Hallo. . . . Wen möchten Sie sprechen? Judy? Moment, ich will mal sehen ob sie zu Hause ist. [Covers receiver. To Judy:] Judy, das Telefon. Für dich. Ein Robert.
JUDY (with a pained wince): Robert? [Defense gesture of crossing hands rapidly to and fro in front of her; whispers urgently:] Ich bin nicht zu Hause!
TEACHER (into the phone): Hallo, Judy ist nicht zu Hause. Wiederhören. [Hangs up.]

Sometimes an expression the book gives you can be dramatized through a mini-dialogue. In the chapter on the reflexive, our German book uses the sentence, "Ich habe mich verletzt." (I hurt myself.) This inspired one of us to compose the following dialogue:

A (mimes driving nails with a hammer; hits finger; jumps up and down in pain): Au, Scheisse, Mensch!
B (innocently and a bit stupidly): Hast du dich verletzt?
A (furious): Ja klar hab ich mich verletzt, du Arschloch! Das siehst du doch!
STUDENT IN ROOM (gets up energetically, gasps in shock): Diese Sprache! Ich bin schockiert! [Stamps out, slamming the door.]

If the language bothers you, remember that obscenities have little or no shock value for nonnative speakers. This dialogue can be typed onto cards so that student volunteers can rehearse it out of class for classroom performance. Grammatically, it contains a reflexive verb in two sentences.

In German, when one breaks a glass, spills something, or commits some other minor faux pas, the standard reaction of the hostess or host is, "Nicht so schlimm." ("That's all right," but literally, "Not so bad.") In northern Germany, it will be uttered at a pitch that is lower than normal: "Nicht so schlimm!" How does one go about dramatizing this stock utterance? Before the class a suitable student is collared to act as hostess or host, and the student is given the dialogue on a card:

> GUEST (mimes coming in the door, offers hand, and mimes handing over the Mitbringsel of flowers).
> HOSTESS OR HOST (shakes hands with guest; mimes putting away the flowers).
> GUEST (looks around to take in the scene, gushes): Eine sehr schöne Party!
> HOSTESS OR HOST (holds a long piece of chalk as if it were a piece of delicate stemware): Ein Glas Wein?
> GUEST (takes the piece of chalk; holds up the piece of chalk and admires it): Das Glas ist wunderschön. [Drops the chalk, which shatters on the floor. Gasps, shocked and mortified:] Oh, das tut mir sehr sehr leid!
> HOSTESS OR HOST (looks up briefly for an aside): Das Stück fünfzehn Dollar! [Steels self; with a determined smile and a gesture of belittlement; to the guest:] Nicht so schlimm!

This scenario can be re-enacted at the beginning of the next class period with new actors. The dramatization may seem like a lot of effort for three words, but it only takes about a minute of class time, is perceived by the students as entertaining, and puts them in a receptive frame of mind for the rest of the hour. More significantly, it demonstrates in a specific instance an important learning strategy that students should be using independently, the strategy of imagining situations that make utterances plausible.

Here is a minidialogue we wrote in connection with our textbook's chapter on the subjunctive. It introduces two subjunctive verb phrases and the expression Lust haben (to feel like doing something). A young man, interested in a young woman, is issuing a romantic invitation to his apartment:

A young man and a young woman are seated next to each other.
YOUNG MAN (leans toward the young woman; with a lecherous grin and raising of the eyebrows): Hättest du Lust, bei mir ein Glas Wein zu trinken?
YOUNG WOMAN (hesitates).
YOUNG MAN (lecherous as before): Ich habe tolle Schallplatten.
YOUNG WOMAN (coldly): Nein, ich habe keine Lust.
YOUNG MAN (not giving up): Keine Lust? Wieso keine Lust?
YOUNG WOMAN (aside): So ein Arschloch! [To the young man, with a listless shrug:] Ich habe einfach keine Lust.
YOUNG MAN (dreamily): Schade. Es wäre sehr schön gewesen.

The model for such minidialogues is not the stage but television. The teacher can demonstrate this by framing the student actors between the right angles formed by the thumb and the forefinger of each outstretched hand. The genre model should be the television commercial, with its ability to dramatize an entire situation in two or three sequences in a minute or less. In German, the Guten Tag series was introduced over a decade ago, but each episode lasted fifteen minutes, wasted too much valuable class time on empty footage, and had an elaborate story line that frequently lead to corniness and militated against a controlled vocabulary. By using the American television commercial as a genre model, one could go to the country where the language is spoken and videotape dramatizations of a large number of utterances. Extraneous material and an uncontrolled vocabulary could be kept to a minimum by careful scripting and the judicious use of cuts and fadeouts.

In German, for example, one orders and purchases things by simply naming the thing and the amount or it desired without a partitive: "Eine Tasse Kaffee, bitte!" (Literally, "A cup coffee, please.") Anyone wishing to dramatize this sort of utterance

on film or videotape could go to Germany, identify the authentic utterances, and write a script taking the main character into a full-service butcher shop, a bakery, and a fruit vendor on the market place: "Hundert Gramm Salami, bitte:" "Ein halbes Pfund Leberwurst, bitte:" "Ein Zwei-Pfund-Brot, bitte:" "Ein Pfund Kirschen, bitte:" A long series of such utterances could be put together in a presentation lasting no more than two or three minutes. The important thing would be to keep the context minimal and to avoid the constraints of a longer piece of discourse devoted to a single situation.

Here is a script for a thirty-second video spot dramatizing the reflexive verb sich verabschieden, which refers to all the polite niceties of saying goodbye and taking one's leave. It occurs in two stereotyped sentences: "Ich muss mich noch verabschieden," and, "Darf ich mich Verabschieden?" Our tentative script is as follows:

Scene: The street in front of a chalet-style house, obviously in Germany, Austria, or Switzerland. A young man waits in the foreground at the trunk of a car, opening the trunk lid. A young woman comes down the walk, carrying a suitcase, which the young man takes and puts into the trunk of the car.
YOUNG MAN: So,können wir schon fahren?
YOUNG WOMAN: Noch nicht. Ich muss mich noch verabschieden.

Scene: A middle-aged man and his wife stand in the vestibule of their house. The young woman walks in.
YOUNG WOMAN (outstretched hand for the handshake): So, darf ich mich verabschieden?
Polite niceties. Fade to black. Elapsed time: no more than thirty seconds.

We hope to be able to make some tapes for our own use in the classroom, and we believe that such clips should eventually become a regular part of all our teaching materials at the elementary level.

Barbara and Francis Lide

Script for a series of short scenes to teach the separable verbs abfahren, ankommen, anrufen, abholen, aufmachen, zumachen, einsteigen, umsteigen, aussteigen.

VIDEO	AUDIO
1. Wide shot of train station in Frankfurt. Zoom in on two friends, A and B, hurrying down the train platform.	(Typical train station noises in background)
A and B stop to listen, hurry off to the train.	A: Wir müssen bald einsteigen. Der Zug fährt ab.
	Voice over (loudspeaker): Achtung, Achtung: Zug Nummer 24 nach München fährt von Gleis 3 ab. Alle einsteigen: Die Türen schliessen: Der Zug fährt ab:
Fade to black.	
Fade in on: 2. Med. shot of the two friends, seated in a train compartment.	(Sound of train going fast over the tracks)
	B: Hier ist es warm. Machen wir das Fenster auf:
B gets up and opens the window. Pull back to show a fellow passenger, an elderly lady. As B opens the window, a huge blast of air comes in and hits the lady.	
	Lady: Es zieht: Bitte, machen Sie das Fenster wieder zu:
Zoom in for med. shot of B, who looks disappointed and politely closes the window.	
Fade to black.	
3. Fade in on Med. shot of the two friends sitting in the compartment. They look rumpled, bored.	A: Du, wo müssen wir umsteigen?
	B: Weißt du das nicht mehr? Wir steigen in München um.
Fade to black.	
4. Fade in on shot of train pulling into station. Cut to med. shot of friends in compartment. Camera follows B, as he (or she) gets up and goes to the window and looks out.	B: So. München. Jetzt steigen wir um:

VIDEO	AUDIO
Pull back for wide shot of A and B getting their bags from the overhead rack. Fade to black.	Voice over (loudspeaker): München Hauptbahnhof. Alle aussteigen. Der Zug endet hier.
5. Fade in on wide shot of München train station (or other train station). (Pan to show signs, etc.) Cut to med. shot of A and B drinking a beer in the station. A has a train schedule. A consults schedule. A looks at his watch.	B: Wann fährt der Zug nach Innsbruck? A: Um fünf Uhr vierzig. Es ist höchste Zeit. Wir müssen bald einsteigen. Voice over (loudspeaker): Achtung, Achtung: Zug Nummer D-324 nach Innsbruck, Venedig, Florenz und Rom fährt von Gleis 15 ab. Bitte, alle einsteigen und die Türen schliessen. Der Zug fährt ab:
A and B drink up, grab their bags, and rush off to the train. Fade to black.	
6. Fade in on wide shot of A and B in a train compartment, seated. Again, with a lady in the compartment.	(Sound of train pulling out of station) A: Du, mach das Fenster auf. Es ist warm hier! B (to lady): Hätten Sie was dagegen, wenn ich das Fenster aufmache? Lady: Bitte, bitte...
B opens the window and sits down. As the train picks up speed, blasts of air come in and the lady's hair gets blown. Fade to black.	(sound of train gathering speed) Lady: Bitte, machen Sie das Fenster wieder zu. Es zieht.
7. Fade in on med. shot of A and B, sitting in the compartment.	A. Wann kommen wir in Innsbruck an? B. Ungefähr um acht. Wenn wir ankommen, muß ich meine Tante anrufen. Sie holt uns vom Bahnhof ab.